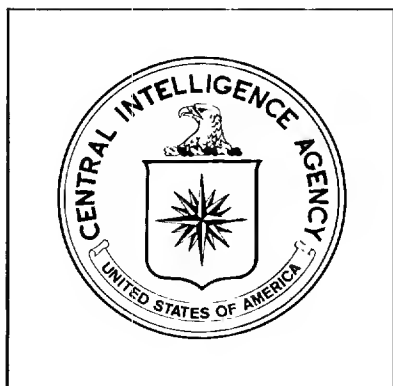


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May 22, 1975

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WESTERN EUROPE — CANADA — INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

This publication is prepared for regional specialists in the Washington community by the Western Europe Division, Office of Current Intelligence, with occasional contributions from other offices within the Directorate of Intelligence. Comments and queries are welcome. They should be directed to the authors of the individual articles.

CONTENTS



25X1D

Independent Republicans Building Party Machine to Challenge Gaullists	3
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---



25X6

Guess Who's Coming to the NATO Summit Dinner.	7
Austria Tempers Dispute With Yugoslavia	9
French Foreign Minister Living on Borrowed Time.	11

May 22, 1975

TOP SECRET UMBRA

25X1D

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Next 1 Page(s) In Document Exempt

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TOP SECRET UMBRA

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Independent Republicans Building Party Machine
to Challenge Gaullists

French President Giscard's party, the Independent Republicans, is slowly building a nationwide organization it hopes will allow it to reduce the Gaullists' numerical dominance of the governing majority in the next election. The Independent Republicans have 64 Assembly members; the Gaullists hold about 170 of the 490 seats. Parliamentary elections are scheduled for 1978 and are unlikely to be called sooner, according to party president Poniatowski, who is also Giscard's right-hand man, because the IR needs time to prepare for the competition.

The party is a moderately conservative movement that was formed in 1962 when Giscard led members of the former right-wing National Center of Independents and Peasants into an alliance with President de Gaulle. Its main purpose since then has been to advance Giscard. Now the party of the president, it has been trying for the past year to shed its image as a collection of notables--often unresponsive to party discipline--and to label itself as a centrist movement to which moderates of both left and right can rally. These efforts have been hobbled by party leaders' need to concentrate on their new duties in the national government.

[REDACTED] Poniatowski has recently admitted that the IR lacks the organization and grass roots support to whittle down the Gaullists' support. He does not delude

May 22, 1975

TOP SECRET UMBRA

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himself that the IR can soon replace the Gaullists as the largest group in the majority coalition, but he does hope to come close to equaling their parliamentary strength in 1978. There is as yet no solid evidence that the voters will shift their allegiance to the IR as a consequence of Giscard's election and his relative success as president, but some recent polls have suggested such a trend.

The party leadership is considering specific tactics to increase its strength. Only 50-60 incumbent Gaullist deputies will be designated for re-election as "candidates of the presidential majority." The remainder will have to compete in the first round of the elections against candidates endorsed by the Elysee. District boundaries may also be redrawn. Gerrymandering now makes it possible for the Gaullists to win more Assembly seats than justified by their percentage of the total votes. The Independent Republicans are also revitalizing their youth groups in a nationwide search for talent and to establish grass roots contacts with voters. The head of the youth league claims that Poniatowski has told him that a "drastic" infusion of youth into the party would aid its move toward the center. The organization also has a broader role: to end the lack of an effective and permanent local political machinery that has been one of the deficiencies of the non-leftist French parties.

Poniatowski intends to exert direct control over efforts to establish local party machines. An essential element of his plans is the shifting of the allegiance of the centrally appointed prefects, who answer to him in his role as Interior Minister. These officials act as middle-man between the national government and the local population in each of the 95 departments. After 15 years of Gaullist rule, they tend to look out for the interests of the Gaullist party and its local representatives. Poniatowski will suggest that their continued tenure may well depend upon a change of attitude.

May 22, 1975

~~TOP SECRET UMBRA~~

~~TOP SECRET UMBRA~~

The prefect can direct funding available from the central government toward projects desired by certain local candidates and away from those proposed by their rivals. The voters soon see who can do the most for them if elected to the Assembly. Vital local decisions are increasingly taken not by the elected departmental council, but by the prefect after consulting one of his myriad advisory committees. Prefects may increase the stature of local dignitaries by appointing them to those committees, which are the formal communication channels with local constituents. Such an appointment is of little use in boosting a candidate's chances, however, if the voters do not willingly accept him as a capable intermediary.

About a third of France's 95 departments are no longer able to provide sufficiently dynamic indigenous leadership to run local affairs, much less graduate to the Assembly level. Poniatowski does not necessarily intend to recruit local talent as IR candidates in all 490 constituencies. In France, aspiring Assembly members often "parachute" into districts--except in regions with strong local cultures such as the Basque and Breton areas--in which they do not reside if they believe their chances for election are good. (Secret No Foreign Dissem)

May 22, 1975

~~TOP SECRET UMBRA~~

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Guess Who's Coming to the NATO Summit Dinner

French President Giscard announced yesterday that he has accepted the invitation of Belgian King Baudouin to attend the dinner to be held for the heads of government participating in the NATO summit in Brussels on May 29 and 30. France, however, will still be represented at the talks by Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues.

[REDACTED] senior officials of the French Foreign Ministry claim that the President has been uncomfortable about France's low-level representation at the NATO summit. [REDACTED]

Giscard has little enthusiasm for the solitary role France has played since de Gaulle's presidency.

[REDACTED] believe that domestic political pressures--both from leftist opposition parties and hard-line Gaullists of Giscard's own majority--have forced Giscard to make a show of slighting the NATO summit by downgrading French representation. Giscard reportedly fears that his concession to domestic opponents of NATO will be interpreted as an admission of political weakness by the other NATO members.

Paris has argued against the NATO summit on the grounds that the Alliance's internal problems were fully covered at the meeting in Ottawa last summer. French officials assert that most problems currently facing NATO fall outside the purview of the Alliance. Another argument advanced by the French contends that a

May 22, 1975

TOP SECRET UMBRA

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NATO summit will add to the "bloc confrontation" atmosphere at the European security conference summit that will probably take place sometime this year.

By treating the NATO summit as "just another ministerial" meeting but by attending the informal dinner himself, Giscard will be able to assure domestic opponents of NATO that he remains unflinching in his opposition to the summit while reaping the benefits of consulting with other national leaders. (Secret No Foreign Dissem/Controlled Dissem)

May 22, 1975

-8-

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Austria Tempers Dispute With Yugoslavia

Despite Yugoslav assertions last week that Austria has failed to protect minority rights as required under the State Treaty, Chancellor Kreisky is prepared to continue bilateral contacts with Belgrade on other topics.

Although Kreisky recalled his ambassador in Belgrade "to report" on the controversy, the Chancellor's recent attitude suggests that the emissary may soon return to his post. Furthermore, Vienna still intends to send a delegation to Belgrade for talks on improving educational opportunities for Yugoslav guest workers in Austria.

At the heart of the dispute is Article seven of the State Treaty which stipulates that Austrian authorities must provide road signs in the language of local minorities resident in certain parts of Austria. In September 1972, extremists among the German-speaking majority in the province of Carinthia tore down roads signs in the language of the local Slovene minority. Ever since this incident, the Yugoslav government has alleged that Vienna is ignoring its obligations under the State Treaty. Belgrade also charged that Vienna has failed to restrict the activities of anti-Titoist emigres on Austrian soil. The Yugoslavs issued a particularly strong statement on the eve of celebrations commemorating the twentieth anniversary of the Austrian State Treaty on May 15. Kreisky quickly rejected the protest and recalled Vienna's ambassador.

Media in both capitals are still trading insults. The Yugoslav press hammered away at the pan-German syndrome which it contends is a hold-over from Austria's

May 22, 1975

~~TOP SECRET UMBRA~~

participation on the side of Nazi Germany in World War II. Not to be outdone, the Austrian radio accused the Yugoslav press of irresponsibility and dredged up the record of fanatical Serbian agitation before World War I that led to the assassination of Franz-Ferdinand and the outbreak of war. (Confidential)

May 22, 1975

TOP SECRET UMBRA

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French Foreign Minister Living on
Borrowed Time

French Foreign Minister Sauvagnargues is coming under increasingly heavy criticism from the Paris press, leading to renewed speculation that he may be on his way out.

Ever since last fall, Sauvagnargues has been tipped by French political observers as a likely candidate for replacement. Over the past several weeks the Paris press--with which Sauvagnargues has had consistently bad relations--has moved from allegations that the foreign minister is unhappy and frustrated with his job to a frontal assault clearly aimed at hastening his departure.

The respected left-of-center Le Monde and the Gaullist-oriented newsweekly Le Point have led the charge, accusing Sauvagnargues, and by implication, Giscard of ineptitude and lack of direction in foreign policy. The cover story in the current issue of Le Point--"The Gaffes of French Diplomacy"--blames the foreign minister for three recent major setbacks in French diplomacy: the collapse of the Paris energy preparatory conference, lack of progress in constructing a united Europe, and failure of the French initiative in Indochina. Citing Sauvagnargues as an "illustration of the Peter Principle," Le Point speculates that a stronger foreign minister might temper Giscard's more ill-considered flights of enthusiasm.

The press has also pounced on a series of recent alleged gaffes by Sauvagnargues--most notably, his introduction of pianist Arthur Rubinstein as "Mr. Toscanini" at an official dinner for Israeli Foreign Minister Allon.

May 22, 1975

TOP SECRET UMBRA

Last week Giscard and Prime Minister Chirac both moved to defend Sauvagnargues and counter speculation about his imminent departure from the government. Earlier this week, the president assured his cabinet that there would be no reshuffle "at the moment." The show of unity by the government seems pro forma, however, and has not affected the general feeling that Sauvagnargues is living on borrowed time. Giscard is, in essence, defending himself, since the foreign minister is widely regarded as a presidential cat's paw, and Chirac's desire to see Sauvagnargues replaced has been well known for some time. The US embassy in Paris notes that the editorial board of Le Point has become closely tied to Chirac in the last few months.

It seems likely that Sauvagnargues will step down before the year is out, but the timing of such a move is difficult to predict. He is unlikely to be replaced before the end of the current Assembly session at the end of June. For maximum political impact, Giscard would probably wait until sometime after the summer doldrums and before the opening of the next Assembly in October. (Confidential)

May 22, 1975

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